

Satan Sanderson

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"Hearts Courageous," Etc.
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"He has as good as admitted to Miss Holme that he knows who did it."
"Come, come! Putting his neck into the noose for mere Quixotic feeling? And who, pray, in this God forsaken town, should he be sacrificing himself for?" the doctor asked satirically.
"That's the rub," said the lawyer. "Nobility. Yet I hang by my proposition."



Deluged the itinerant.

Well, Hugh Stires is not only the Reverend Henry Something-or-other, but he is that man too! The crack brained old idiot would have told the tale all over again only the crowd hustled him. There he is now," he said suddenly as a light sprang up and voices broke out on the opposite corner. "The gang is standing by. I see your friend Barney McGinn," he added, with a grim enjoyment. "I doubt if there are many converts tonight."

Even as he spoke there came a shout of laughter and warning. The spectators scattered in all directions, and a stream of water from a well directed hose deluged the itinerant and his music box.

Ten minutes later the street preacher, drenched and furious, was trundling his melodeon toward Funeral Hollow, on his way to the coast.



Chapter 28

Harry stood again in the obscure half-darkness of his cell. It came to him that the present had a far-reaching significance; that it was but the handiwork and resultant of forces in his own past. He himself had set Hugh's feet on the red path that had pointed him to the shameful terminus. He had gambled for Hugh's future, forgetting that his past remained, a thing that must be covered. He had won Hugh's counters, but his own right to be himself he had staked and lost long before that game on the communion table under the painted crucifixion.

The words he had once said to Hugh recurred to him with a kind of awe: "Put myself in your place? I wish to God I could!"

Fate—or was it God?—had taken him at his word. He had been hurled like a stone from a catapult into Hugh's place—to bear his knavery, to suffer his dishonor and to redeem the baleful reputation he had made.

A step outside the cell, the turning of the key. The door opened, and Jessica, pale and trembling, stood on the threshold.

"I cannot help it," she said as she came toward him, "though you told me not to come. I have trusted all the while and waited—and prayed. But today I was afraid. Surely, surely, the man you are protecting has had time enough. Hasn't he? Won't you tell them the truth now?"

He knew not how to meet the piteous reproach and terror of that look. She had not heard the street preacher's declaration, he knew, but even if she had it would have been to her only an echo of the old mooted likeness. He had given her comfort once, but this was no more; he, no matter what it meant to him or her.

"Jessica," he said steadily, "when you came to me here that first day and I told you not to fear for me I did not mean to deceive you. I thought then that it would all come right. But after something has happened since then—something that makes a difference. I cannot tell who was the murderer of

Moreau. I cannot tell you or any one else, either now or at any time."

She gazed at him startled. She had a sudden conception of some element hitherto unguessed in his makeup—something inveterate and adamant. Could it be that he did not intend to tell at all? The very idea was monstrous. Yet that clearly was his meaning. She looked at him with flashing eyes.

"You mean you will not!" she exclaimed bitterly. "You are bent on sacrificing yourself, then? You are going to take this risk because you think it brave and noble, because somehow it fits your man's gospel. Can't you see how wicked and selfish it is? You are thinking only of him and of yourself, not of me."

"Jessica, Jessica!" he protested, with a groan. But in the self torture of her questionings she paid no heed.

"Don't you think I suffer? Haven't I borne enough in the months since I married you for you to want to save me this? Do you owe me nothing, me whom you so wronged, whose?"

She stopped suddenly at the look on his face of mortal pain, for she had struck harder than she knew. It pierced through the fierce resentment to her deepest heart, and all her love and pity gushed back upon her in a torrent. She threw herself on her knees by the bare cot, crying passionately:

"Oh, forgive me! Forget what I said! I did not mean it. I have forgiven you a thousand times over. I never ceased to love you. I love you now more than all the world."

"It is true," he said, hoarse misery in his tone. "I have wronged you. If I could coin my blood drop by drop to pay for the past I could not set that right. If giving my life over and over again would save you pain I would give it gladly. But what you ask now is one thing I cannot do. It would make me a pitiful coward. I did not kill Moreau. That is all I can say to you or to those who try me."

"Your life!" she said with dry lips. "It will mean that. That counts so fearfully much to me, more than my own life a hundred times. Yet there is something that counts more than all that to you."

His face was that of a man who holds his hand in the fire. "Jessica," he said, "it is like this with me. When you found me here—the day I saw you on the balcony—I was a man whose soul had lost its compass and its bearings. My conscience was asleep. You woke it, and it is fiercely alive now. And now with my memory has come back a debt of my past that I never paid. Whatever the outcome, for my soul's sake I must settle it now and wipe it from the score forever."

She rose slowly to her feet, with a despairing gesture.

"He saved others," she quoted in a hard voice; "himself he could not save!" I once heard a minister preach from that text at home. It was your friend, the Rev. Henry Sanderson. I thought it a very spiritual sermon then. That was before I knew what his companionship had been to you."

"If there were any justice in the universe," she added, "it should be he immolating himself now, not you. But for him you would never be here. He ruined your life and mine, and I hate and despise him for a selfish hypocrite."

That was what he himself had seemed to her in those old days. The edge of a flush touched his forehead as he said slowly, almost appealingly:

"He was not a hypocrite, Jessica. Whatever he was it was not that. At college he did what he did too openly. That was his failing, not caring what others thought. He despised weakness in others. He thought it none of his affair. So others were influenced. But after he came to see things differently from another standpoint—when he went into the ministry—he would have given the world to undo it."

"Men's likings are strange," she said. "Because he never had temptations like yours and has never done what the law calls wrong you think he is as noble as you—noble enough to shield a murderer to his own danger."

"Ah, no, Jessica," he interposed gently. "I only said that in my place he would do the same."

"But you are shielding a murderer," she insisted fiercely. "You will not admit it, but I know. There can be no justice or right in that. If Harry Sanderson is all you think him, if he stood here now and knew the whole, he would say it was wicked—not brave and noble, but wicked and cruel."

He shook his head, and the sad shadow of a bitter smile touched his lips. "He would not say so," he said.



"It should be he immolating himself now, not you."

A dry sob answered him. He turned and leaned his elbows on the narrow window sill, every nerve aching, but powerless to comfort. He heard her step. The door closed sharply.

Then he faced into the empty cell, sat down on the cot and threw out his arms, with a hopeless cry:

"Jessica, Jessica!"

Jessica left the jail with despair in her heart. The hope on which she had fed these past days had failed her. What was there left for her to do? Like a swift wind, she went up the street to Felder's office. She groped her way up the unlighted stair and tapped on the door. There was no answer. She pushed it open and entered the empty outer room, where a study lamp burned on the desk.

A pile of legal looking papers had been set beside it, and with them lay a torn page of a newspaper whose familiar caption gave her a stab of pain. Perhaps the news of the trial had found its way across the ranges to where the names of Stires and Moreau had been known. Perhaps every one at Aniston already knew of it, was reading about it, pitying her. She picked it up and scanned it hastily. There was no hint of the trial, but her eye caught the news which had played its role in the courtroom, and she read it to the end.

Even in her own trouble she read it with a shiver. Yet, awful as the fate which Harry Sanderson had so narrowly missed, it was not to be compared with that which awaited Hugh, for, awful as it was, it held no shame.

In a gust of feeling she slipped to her knees by the one sofa the room contained and prayed passionately. As she drew out her handkerchief to stanch the tears that came something fell with a musical tinkle at her feet. It was the little cross she had found in front of the hillside cabin that had lain forgotten in her pocket during the past anxious days. As she pressed it the ring at the top gave way, and the cross parted in halves. Words were engraved on the inside of the arms—a date and the name Henry Sanderson.

The recurrence of the name jarred and surprised her. Hugh had dropped it—an old commonplace of the friend who had been his best ideal, his exemplar and whose ancient influence was still dominant. He had clung loyally to the memento, blind in his constant liking to the wrong that friend had done him. She looked at the date. It was May 23. She shuddered, for that was the month and day on which Dr. Moreau had been killed. The point had been clearly established today by the prosecution. To the original owner of that cross perhaps the date that had come into Hugh's life with such a sinister meaning was a glad anniversary.

Suddenly she caught her hand to her cheek. A weird idea had rushed through her brain. The religious symbol had stood for Harry Sanderson, and the chance coincidence of date had irresistibly pointed to the murder. To her excited senses the juxtaposition held a bizarre, uncanny suggestion. This cross, the very emblem of vicarious sacrifice! Suppose Harry Sanderson had never given it to Hugh! Suppose he had lost it on the hillside himself!

(To be continued.)

It is no joke, after all. A dispatch says that four persons who ate frankfurter sausages contracted hydrophobia.

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